Harvest Rain
GUYU
谷雨
MnemonicMask
ENSQUARE EVENTS

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Thank you for checking out *Guyu*!

Guyu
谷雨
Harvest Rain
an ensquare events speedrun zine
about agriculture and the rainy spring

Mod Note

If I were a more unserious person, I would've titled this zine the literal translation of 谷雨 (gǔyǔ): "grain rain." If I were into English sayings, maybe something like "April Showers." But because I was forced to memorize ancient Chinese poetry as a kid, you guys get a slightly more flowery localization instead, as well as these introductory ramblings that are not unlike the unsolicited life story of an online recipe's author.

One early morning in April, I looked outside a vehicle window, saw luscious green grass dotted with yellow dandelions, and thought to myself: wow, life is beautiful and worth living. Did spring cure the seasonal depression I didn't know I had? Was I excited that the end of the semester was nearing? Was I delirious from sleep deprivation? Maybe all three.

Guyu: Harvest Rain is kind of a continuation to *Jingzhe: Awakening of Insects*. I love sharing these cool, lesser-known things about my culture, and my goal is to eventually host a zine for each of the twenty-four Chinese solar terms—maybe even one year-long zine representing all of them.

We've got a few more zines coming up, including *Xiazhi*, a summer and nature themed zine, and *Bailu*, an autumn and bird themed zine. Hope to also see you then!

Happy spring! I hope allergies aren't killing you guys. They sure are getting the upper hand over me.

— techa

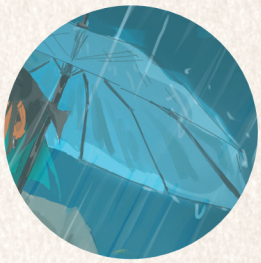
head mod and
formatting guy

this zine also features:

art mod

Zine Themes

谷雨



gǔyǔ, the spring rain that nourishes newly-planted crops
and will bring about a bountiful harvest in the fall

萍始生

píng shǐ shēng,
duckweed begins to sprout

鸣鸠拂其羽

míng jiū fú qí yǔ,
cuckoos shake off their wings

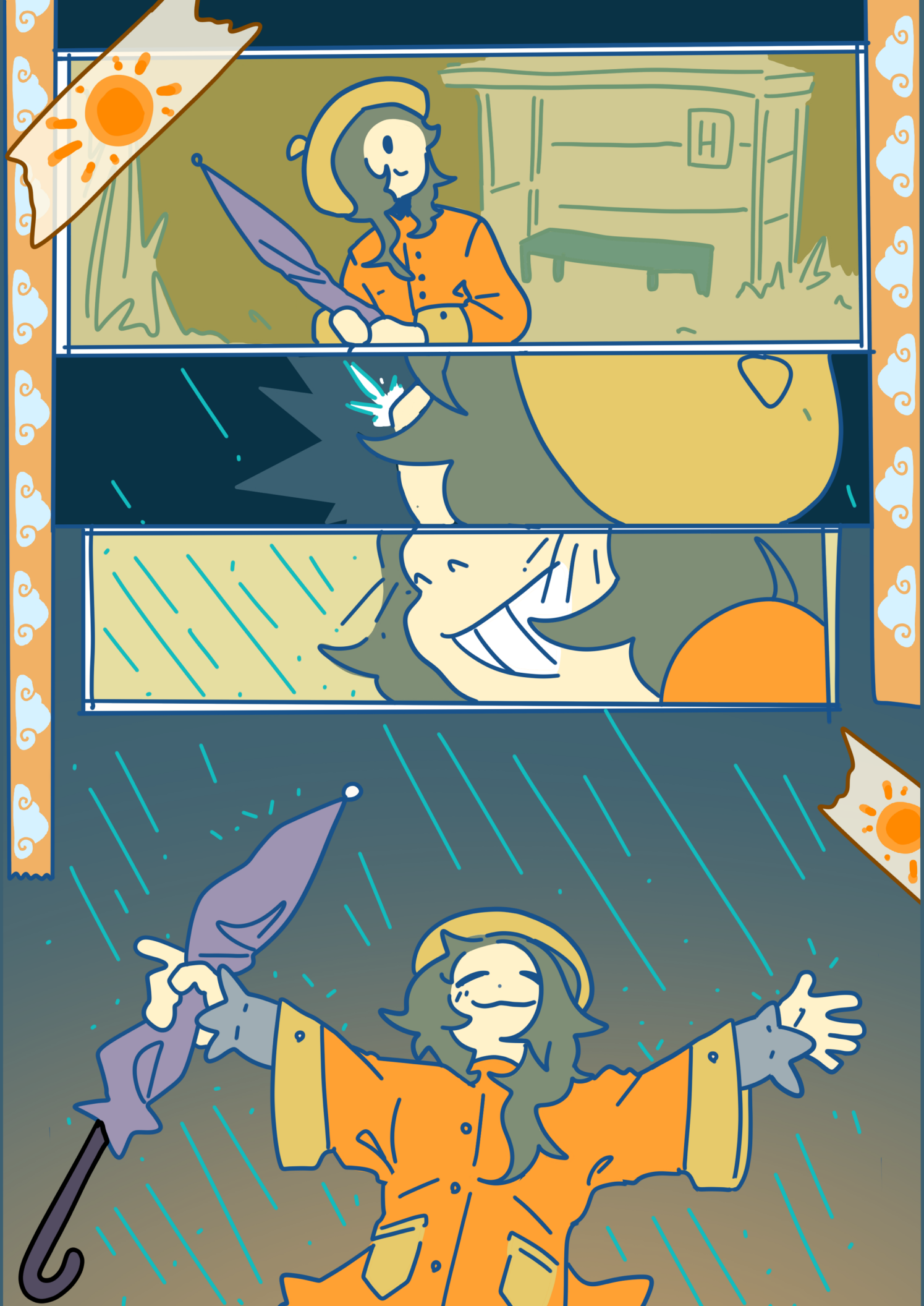
戴胜降于桑

dài shèng jiàng yú sāng,
hoopoes perch in mulberry trees

生长

the overarching topic of
growth in spring

front cover art



back cover art

What the Spring Showers Bring

Pokémon & OC

The forest of the Heartwood is quiet during this time of day. Wurmples inch along the ground, crawling over the roots of the berry trees that Lynn had planted but a year ago. Although the Fieldlands are far from their clan's more frigid home, the temperatures are more ideal for the berries they cultivate and harvest for the Pearl Clan. Their small gathering of Pokémon keep them company as they work diligently among the trees. A Honchkrow sits idly in the branches of one tree keeping a close eye on Lynn as they work. Had it been any other Pokémon, Lynn would have feared being attacked by a wild Pokémon. Luckily, this particular bird Pokémon had taken a liking to watching over them and preening through their braid as if they were a baby Pokémon. As if the motherhenning wasn't enough, Honchkrow had taken to making sure they didn't work themselves to exhaustion… again.

The rustling of tree leaves draws Lynn's attention to their other Pokémon — a sweet, energetic Cherubi floats busily between the trees, her musical chirp punctuating the air as she carefully checks each branch she floated by. Lynn left the Pokémon alone, knowing full well that the berry lookalike took great pride in her work with the berries. Unlike Honchkrow, Lynn knows that Cherubi wouldn't be as upset if Lynn keeled over on the spot for a moment. They suspect Cherubi would even be a little miffed if Lynn took an accidental nap on the ground.

And speaking of naps, a soft snore sounds behind them as they glance back at the huge kitten they call a Shinx. The alpha is only of help when it comes to carrying the extra baskets of berries strapped to his back, acting like a smaller version of a stantler. Otherwise, the Pokémon is more than content to just sleep under the shade of the trees and sniff for honey on the ground. As much as Lynn would like to roll their eyes at their Pokémon, they can't help the affectionate huff that comes from them as they give the sleeping kitten a little pet.

Cherubi makes a scolding chirp at Lynn, probably from getting distracted by Shinx, only for Honchkrow to retort back with a protective caw. As the two Pokémon begin to bicker overhead, some rustling nearby alerts Lynn to their last Pokémon. Their eyes scan past the tall grass and surrounding trees, but the Pokémon remains out of sight. Lynn doesn't seek the Pokémon out — knowing the Pokémon, they would like to keep patrolling the area to keep Lynn safe. To break them from that routine would mean having to placate a very upset Zoroark who's overprotectiveness could result in someone getting maimed. It's best for everyone around Lynn to let Zoroark get their energy out with their patrols.

Cherubi floats down in front of Lynn and sways back and forth, chittering away as Lynn chuckles and pets her soft leaves. The Pokémon coos at the touch before gesturing back to the trees. With a nod, Lynn resumes checking on each tree's growth as Cherubi checks on the branches too high above Lynn. As they check on the blooming flowers that have begun to decorate the trees, a soft, slow pattering makes itself known over their head. Lynn looks up and sees the overcast sky slowly crawling with darker clouds. They can't help the small smile that comes to their face as the rain clouds inch closer to their little orchard. Rain has always been their friend — a familiar constant that stuck even with their memory loss. Even when they first came to, confused and lost in a land they couldn't fully recognize, the sound of rain falling on leaves always helped to make Hisui feel a little… more like what they assume home is.

If they could ever remember what "home" used to be. Now, "home" is the frozen tundras of the Alabasters, where the snow hides the rock hard dirt they worked so hard to break apart and soften for the trees they cultivated there. Home is a group of people wary and superstitious, but still welcoming and kind to their plight.

Home is a man in odd clothing with silver eyes just as confused as theirs, his words spoken in metaphors only a handful of people can vaguely understand, his manner just as distant and yearning as their own when he looks up at the sky they both fell from. They've asked him once if the rain reminds him of his "home," and the man had tilted his head forward, the brim of his hat covering his eyes before he responded with a soft, "A little bit, though I feel as if this hat was not meant to brave the rain."

A droplet lands on their face. They reach a hand up to slowly wipe it away, the rain still building up to the shower that will soon drench them from head to toe. A bewildered mewling draws their attention to the now awake Shinx, the cat sneezing and shaking his head at the sudden wetness dripping onto his head. "Oh, you poor thing," Lynn comforts, the cat already purring as they get to their knees to pet the oversized kitten. "It's alright, you can go inside if you want to." Lynn nods their head to their home away from home — a small hut that's just big enough for themselves and one other Pokémon — the slow addition of other Pokémon was a miscalculation they didn't realize would happen. Despite the small quarters, all their Pokémon still manage to squeeze into the small hut as if they were always meant to be squished together.

Lynn wouldn't have it any other way.

Shinx looks over to the small, warm hut and makes a soft huff. Instead of heading inside, Shinx lays his head on his paws and looks up at Lynn with a slow blink of his eyes. They smile bemused and give the kitten a little kiss atop his head. "Suit yourself." A delighted purr answers them as Shinx curls up into a tight ball, already ignoring the incoming raindrops and returning back to his nap. Like their cat, Lynn also ignores the drops of rain picking up momentum as they return to their work. They hum as the water dampens their braid and slides down their face. Their clothes darken with each wayward drop — the thought of their clothes sticking to their skin stirs up that old sense of yearning. Maybe, in their past, working

in the rain was something they had always done before. It scratches the surface of where their memories are locked away, their fingers itching to dig deeper and deeper into the feeling. And so they continue their work, relishing in the feeling of rain despite whatever drawbacks there may be.

Honchkrow, however, looks less than pleased by Lynn's decision, a disgruntled caw being the only warning Lynn gets before the bird lets out a loud cry. Almost immediately, an answering call responds back to their Honchkrow as beating wings draw closer and closer with brutal efficiency. A flurry of feathers and scattered leaves dive down onto Lynn as they yelp in shock and stumble from the instantaneous appearance of two murkrows. Another caw from Honchkrow and the two smaller birds land on Lynn's shoulders, one wing extended by each bird to form a covering over Lynn's head. An undignified squawk comes from Lynn as Honchkrow caws her amusement.

"Honchkrow!" Lynn stomps their foot on the ground, the grass wet and bouncy from the rain. "I don't need this right now!"

Honchkrow caws again, looking smug and pleased before settling back onto her branch. The two murkrows make mirthful caws as their wings continue to shield Lynn's head from the rain. Lynn themselves sigh and cover their face with their hands. It's a good thing no one else is around the woods at this time, especially in this weather.

The rain continues to fall around them as the ground beneath their feet eagerly soaks up any rainfall that drips past the leaves. Grass becomes slick as it squishes under their boots, the dirt still solid enough to bear their weight without Lynn feeling their feet sink into potential mud. With two new companions on their shoulders, they continue their work and examine the trees, cutting off the excess young, diseased, or broken branches. Cherubi floats down to get their attention every once in a while, pointing them towards a branch that needs removing. The work is peaceful if a bit tedious, but Lynn has always liked that about their... job, they suppose. Is it really a job? Berry tending comes naturally to them, and although their clan certainly enjoy the fruits of their labor, it is by no means a task that was ever assigned to them.

It just... felt like habit. A routine they naturally follow that remains unbroken despite the memory loss. Much like how their fellow clan mate is more inclined to follow paths through dark tunnels despite there being other paths. They've always wondered if Ingo felt more at home in the dark than out in the light.

A low growl followed by an amused huff breaks the soft quiet and their own musings. Lynn turns towards the sound of Zoroark, confused by the guard's noises. "Zoroark? What did—"

The unmistakable squish of wet grass greets their ears, and before they can panic over the thought of a sudden, unwelcomed guest appearing before them, the following curse and thud startles the panic away and replaces it with concern. Zoroark's mocking cackle is heard nearby, the Pokémon sticking their head out to nod Lynn towards the general direction of the unknown person before disappearing again with another cackle.

They'll have to scold Zoroark again about making light of a stranger's misfortunes, Lynn notes as they make their way towards the mystery person. "Hello?" They call out, ducking under branches and scanning the ground for anyone. "Are you… okay?"

"…Oh. Lynn." A deadpan voice responds back, and Lynn's eyes immediately spot the fallen body of a dear friend of theirs. A young woman lies flat on her back with an impassive expression. Long, teal hair is scattered around her as she stares up at the trees above her. The bottom of her one foot is covered in mud, and Lynn can only assume that the woman had slipped terribly to have landed in such a position. Besides her is a worn satchel bag that has seen better days. A Typholosion stands next to her prone body, doing absolutely nothing to help her up. Instead, he meets Lynn's eyes with a sleepy gaze before wandering away to flop down next to their Shinx. The woman refuses to meet Lynn's eyes as Lynn squats down next to her. "I didn't think I'd see you here."

"Hi, Eterna." Lynn can't help the giggle that escapes them as their bangs fall into their eyes, their head tilting with an unspoken question.

Eterna finally flicks her gaze up to Lynn's, teal eyes meeting forest green. "I was foraging. Needed honey for something."

"…was it the Wurmples living in your roof again?" Lynn offers her a hand.

Eterna stares at their hand for a moment before taking it gently. "They were there first. I simply moved in without permission."

Lynn pulls her up with little effort, helping Eterna right herself with a hand placed gently against her back. "So, is it time to pay them for your stay?"

"Oh, I believe I may be late with it." She brushes herself off, a slight twitch at the corner of her mouth when she sees her muddied clothes. "I woke up this morning with a room full of string shot."

"Oh goodness." The Murkrows laugh at Eterna's misfortune as Lynn tries to shush them. They fail. "I guess that explains why you're all the way down here."

"The Heartwoods always have an abundance of honey. I can take what I need without worry." Despite this, a quick glance at her bag confirms to Lynn that Eterna had yet to gather anything. Or if she did, it all spilled out when she fell. Lynn looks over at the slight Eterna shaped indent the woman left in her fall and spies no random foragables lying abandoned.

Odd.

Lynn looks back at Eterna, the lady's gaze fixated on the two Murkrows on their shoulder shielding them from the rain. "Um… I have some honey to spare if you'd like?"

"I wouldn't want to take from your supplies." Eterna continues to stare directly at the birds. The birds stare back in equal measure, a mean glint in their eyes as Eterna continues to speak.

“I’m sure there’s some around here—”

The Murkrows flap their wings at Eterna, water spraying directly onto her face and leaving her drenched with rain water. Eterna’s mouth snaps firmly shut, her eyebrows furrowed as water drips from her bangs.

“Ah! Ahh!” Quickly, Lynn shoos the Murkrows off their shoulder and uses their thick sleeve to wipe up Eterna’s face. A soft huff escapes the woman as her gaze softens.

“Lynn,” she assures the fretting redhead, “it’s alright.”

“But that was still rude of them!” Lynn turns to see Honchkrow already scolding the two murkrows and redirects their attention back to Eterna. “I’m sorry about that… Honchkrow wanted them to keep me covered while I worked, but I didn’t think they’d splash you like that.”

“Rod would be proud to see a bird Pokémon use Splash,” Eterna quips.

“I think he’d like to see them use it on Deimos instead.” Lynn pulls their sleeve away from Eterna’s face, the woman’s teal eyes following each of Lynn’s movements closely. Flustered, Lynn yanks on their braid and laughs awkwardly. “Anyway! Did you, um, did you… want to… get out of the rain?”

Eterna raises an eyebrow and takes Lynn’s hand, untangling their fingers from their braid and gently pulling it away. “While you stay in the rain?”

Their face burns as Lynn tugs their hand out of her grasp and turns away, hiding their face from view. “I have work to do! And I don’t mind the rain.”

“But why? It’s cold and you could get sick.” Eterna drifts closer to their side, and Lynn can feel just how close she is.

“It’s fine.” Lynn waves off her concerns and turns back to the trees they were tending to. “I like the rain.”

“…Why?” There’s a soft shuffle as Eterna keeps to Lynn’s side. “It’s wet and cold. And surely you can do your work when it’s not raining.”

“I could. But…” They reach up to one of the branches, running their thumb against the rain slick leaves. “I just… it feels important to me.”

“…The rain? Why?”

“Well… it nourishes my trees. And when my trees finally bloom, I’ll be able to send food over to my clan. With how cold the Alabasters are, any amount of food is good. But I want to make sure I’m growing as much food as possible, even if it’s just berries. And like with any kind of crop, the rain becomes your best friend. While the rain waters my trees, I can actually

focus on tending to them." Cherubi floats down and nuzzles Lynn's face, before chirping and gathering all the pruned branches left on the ground. "This way, the ground stays moist and I don't have to worry about it drying out. The roots get all the water it needs without me having to carry buckets and buckets of water from the river. I guess Shinx can help me with that, but he gets lazy and always stops halfway."

"That's because he's still a kitten. All kittens behave like that." Eterna's voice is a little distant, so they turn around and find her kneeling on the ground, petting their Shinx's head gently. The cat Pokémon purrs and leans into her touch, content by the attention. "I'm surprised this little one is fine in the rain."

"Oh, he doesn't like it. But he stays outside to stay with me."

"Does he?"

"Yeah, he knows I like the rain. Knows that… I like to sit in it."

"Why's that?" At this point, Eterna has moved from kneeling to sitting against the large Shinx. The Pokémon continues to purr and looks directly at Lynn with slow blinking eyes. Eterna simply looks at them, a silent request in her eyes as water still drips from her bangs. Despite her earlier complaints, she doesn't seem to mind the rain.

Lynn settles down next to her, watching as Cherubi continues to work without them. The trees are perfectly trimmed now; no need to worry about them getting sick or having too many branches. "The rain… reminds me of home. I think."

Eterna tilts her head to the side. "Do you mean your clan?"

"…No." Lynn runs their hands through the blades of grass. Moist dirt clings to their fingers. Comforting. Familiar. "I think it reminds me of where I came from, probably. Like… before I fell. Before I landed… here. Maybe, I used to live somewhere that always rained."

A small, well worn path. A little gate. The sound of rain dancing against leaves overhead. Wind brushing past them. And a Pokémon. Just a bit shorter than them. Birdlike. Blue.

Familiar.

Like water.

Lynn blinks, and the grass slips past their fingers. It leaves streaks of moisture behind as they look down at their dirtied hands.

"I see." Eterna hums thoughtfully. "I suppose that makes sense."

They both sit in silence for a while. Typhlosion yawns and curls up next to her, resting his head on her lap as the rain sizzles off his fur. Zoroark finally shows their face, the ghost type staring down Eterna before settling down next to Lynn and leaning against them.

It's quiet. Despite all the rain, the forest is quiet. Lynn closes their eyes and feels the droplets sink past their clothes and onto their skin. If they breathe in deeply enough, they swear they can catch a whiff of something sweet. Something warm. It smells good. They know what it tastes like.

What does it taste like?

They open their mouth.

A drop of rain.

…What did they expect? Lynn opens their eyes and stares back up at the leaves covering the sky. They love the rain, they do. But it always feels like it's dangling something in front of them. Always out of reach, like a berry growing at the top of a tree. And they want it so badly.

"Lynn?"

Lynn turns to Eterna, the young woman suppressing a shiver from the cold. Oh, shoot, they should really get her out of the—

"Tell me more about the rain."

"…huh?"

"Tell me more about the rain." Eterna nods towards their trees, the forest, the Heartwoods and the surrounding land. "If it reminds you of your lost memories, then tell me more about the rain."

"I…" Lynn looks away nervously. What else is there to talk about? Zoroark nudges their head under Lynn's hand, looking up at them with a knowing gaze.

Ingo once told them how the little things could sometimes stir up those forgotten fragments he thought he'd lost forever. A shadow on the wall. The sound of footsteps echoing behind him. A distant ringing chime that he swears he hears at night. He asked them once what little fragments they could remember.

All they could remember was a blue blob that followed them around, and—

"Petrichor."

"Excuse me?"

The word comes to them suddenly, confusing and startling, but it feels right to say.
"Petrichor. I think it's… something I learned about once."

"What is it?"

“It’s that smell after a rainstorm. Usually the first rain.” The word brings up memories of bookshelves lining a wall, a book held in their hands. *Petrichor* stands out in walls of text, as if it was something they had been searching for this entire time. “Yes, I remember. It’s one of my favorite smells, and I wanted to know what it was called. Petrichor.”

“Petrichor,” Eterna repeats. “I wonder what it smells like.”

“If you stick around long enough, maybe…?”

“Hmm.” Eterna makes a thoughtful hum before turning to Lynn with a small smile. “I think I will.”

A little blush dusts their cheeks, but Lynn ignores it and instead smiles back. “Oh, yay!”

“What else do you like about the rain?”

“Well…”

Somehow, Lynn continues to speak about the rain of all things. It shocks them too, but Eterna listens attentively as she pets her Pokémon’s head despite this. And so, Lynn talks. They tell her about how they appreciate the rain after a long, hot day tending to their trees, how refreshing it feels to have the cold rain wash away their sweat and grime. They tell her how the rain makes them appreciate grass more, that it keeps the ground from turning completely into mud. They tell her how the texture of grass changes with the rain — that they like to pull out blades of grass every once and a while just to trace out the shape of it. They tell her how the splashing of footsteps reminds them of… something. Not something human but something with Pokémon. Multiple Pokémon. They knew what each splashing step belonged to which Pokémon. They knew all those Pokémon too, at one point. It leaves an ache in Lynn’s chest to recall, or at least attempt to recall.

“The rain… one of them loved the rain so much. They used to dance all the time during rain showers.”

“What did this Pokémon look like?”

“…Blue. That’s all I can really remember.” Lynn reaches a hand up and wipes away a stray raindrop. “But I know they loved the rain. I hope they still do. I hope they’re still dancing in it, even if I’m not there.”

“Mmm. I’m sure they are.” Eterna wipes her face off, scowling slightly as moisture returns. “I wish I could love the rain as much as you do.”

“Oh, I don’t expect you to. In fact, I think there’s a lot of people like you who hate the rain.” Lynn giggles as the scowl turns into a straight lipped frown. “Here, let me…” They lean closer and pull out an extra bandanna to wipe off Eterna’s face again. “There we are! All dry until the rain comes back to bother you.”

“Sure,” Eterna says. “I guess I’ll just wait for my face to get wet again.”

Lynn giggles again and moves to wipe down the incoming moisture only to… stop. They blink and look up at the sky. Not a single drop of water hits their face. “Would you look at that?” They mumble to themselves, the gray clouds drifting away in the sky.

“I guess I can’t really wait for the rain any longer. But that’s fine.” With a stretch, she gently nudges Typhlosion off her lap. Eterna is still dripping wet, but she stands up and simply dusts her clothes off. As if that will be enough to dry herself off.

“At least the mud is washed away,” Lynn points out as Eterna straightens up. They stand up as well and watch as Zoroark slinks off to continue their patrol. Shinx merely yawns and shakes himself off, the sleepy kitten returning back to sleep.

“I suppose so.” Eterna looks towards Lynn with a slight tilt of the head. “So. Petrichor?”

“Oh, yes! Petrichor!” They join Eterna’s side, the sun peeking past the clouds and warming their cold skin. The scent of petrichor greets them, earthy and moist as Lynn takes a satisfying whiff of the air around them. Eterna does the same, surprised by the smell she never took notice of until now. Lynn can only smile as the wet grass squishes underneath their boots.

The sight of Eterna’s empty bag reminds them of her earlier mission. They look back at their orchard, Cherubi still floating around aimlessly between the branches. Honchkrow gives them a look from where she rests among the branches and nods.

Their orchard will be fine without them. It won’t hurt to just step away for a little bit. Plus, the sun is so warm out now. A walk could help them dry out a bit. “Eterna?”

The woman looks over to Lynn, her eyes focused on them yet again. “Yes?”

“Why don’t I help you forage for some honey?”

“Oh, you don’t have to do that.”

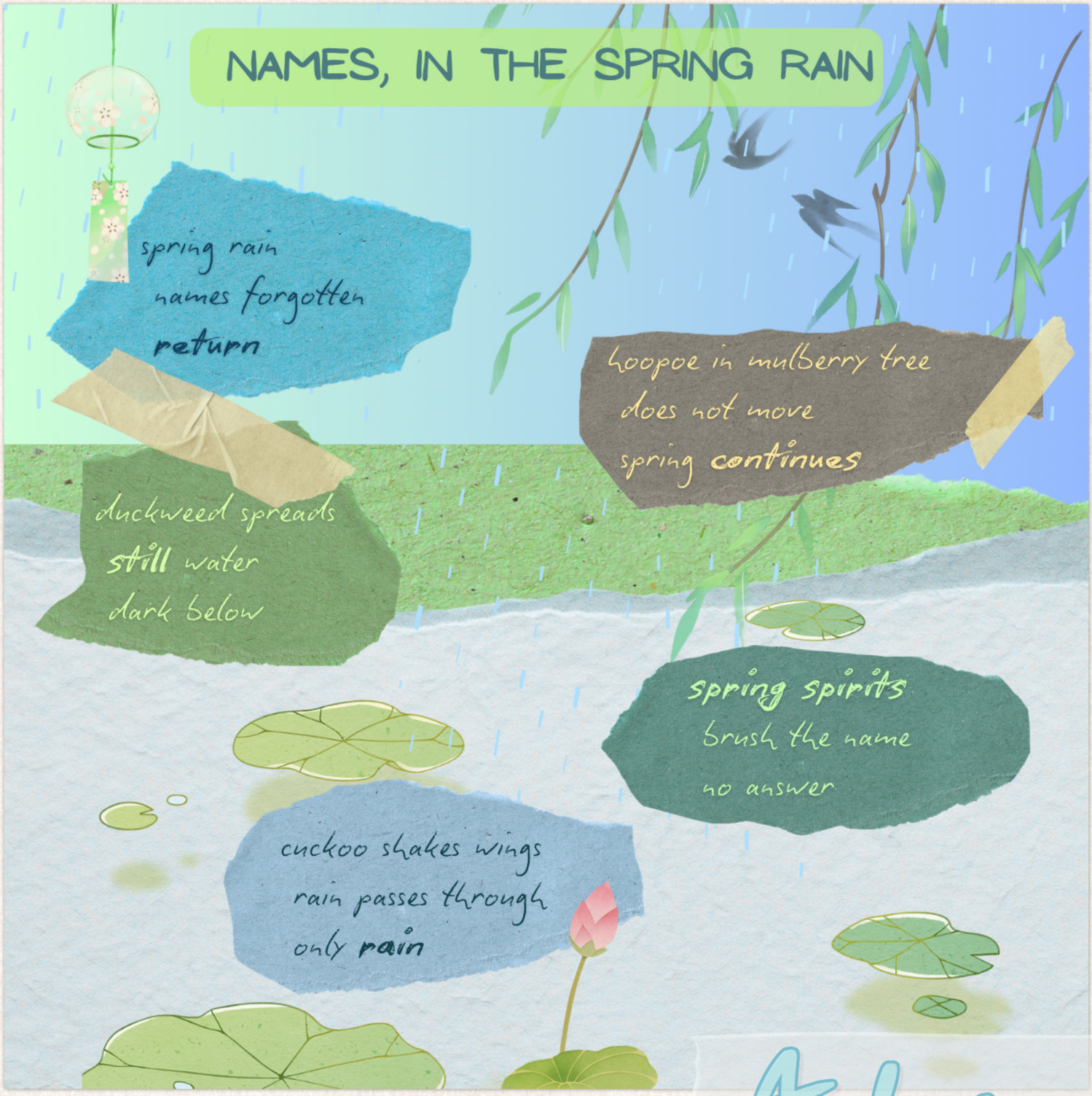
“I insist! After all, you stayed until the rain stopped.”

“Hmm.” Eterna hums, a smile on her lips even as she looks away from Lynn. “I suppose I wouldn’t mind.”

Lynn laughs and joins her friend’s side as Typhlosion and Zoroark trail behind them. Somewhere, they think they hear the splash of webbed feet dancing in the nearby puddles.

Maybe next time they’ll join that dance.

But for now, they’d like to search for some sweet, tasty honey.


NAMES, IN THE SPRING RAIN
spring rain
names forgotten
return
hoopoe in mulberry tree
does not move
spring continues
duckweed spreads
still water
dark below
spring spirits
brush the name
no answer
cuckoo shakes wings
rain passes through
only rain
Adesa

silver springs

Naruto | Naruto/Sasuke

For the record, Sasuke does *not* want to be here.

In early April, the rain is a terrible companion, perpetual day-in, day-out. On days like this, Sasuke prefers the great indoors, curled up inside a blanket with a book and a cup of tea. Usually, he's immovable.

The thing about Uzumaki Naruto, though, is that he can attempt the impossible.

"Sasuke!" Naruto waves at him, knee deep in the pond.

He's completely drenched, for lack of better words. Even with his pants folded up to his knees, his spikes droop sadly around his face from the damp drizzle that's suddenly drifted upon them, and even the whisker scars on his cheeks look wilted, to some degree. Still, his demeanor is anything but.

"You're gonna catch a cold, y'know," Sasuke calls back. There's a disparaging lack of irritation, and he grimaces at the fondness that accompanies it instead. He can even hear the smile laced into his voice, and he knows that if he can hear it, Naruto can too.

He's not paying attention though, instead choosing to plunge his arms into the pond. Duckweed pools around his elbows, gathering green algae against his skin, and Sasuke winces.

"Idiot, you're—"

Water splatters in droplets, rippling across the pond, as Naruto raises his hands victoriously. "Aha! Caught one! Sasuke, look—!"

He thrusts his hands in Sasuke's general direction, a brown toad clutched between his palms. It stares him down, looking as deeply unimpressed as a wild amphibian could possibly be.

His facepalm is instinctual, at this point. "Moron, what is *wrong* with you, put it back—"

Naruto pouts. "But Sasukeeee—! We came looking for frogs—"

"*You* came looking for frogs," Sasuke corrects, deadpan. "I came to make sure you didn't

drown in the pond by some unhappy accident. Though, drowning you myself is looking more and more appealing by the minute."

"You're so dramatic, it's *literally* like two feet deep—"

"And I've watched you freak out in the kiddie side of the pool, *dobe*." Sasuke folds his arms, stares Naruto down from his very *safe* and *dry* spot next to the pond's edge. "What's your point?"

"The *point* is that you should be *helping* me look for frogs—"

"I *never* said I'd do that."

"Right, because when you brought home that ginormous stag beetle last summer, you said you'd never touch one like, five minutes before that. Or when we went to the park last week and you said you were just gonna sit and read your stupid book, and you ended up playing soccer with me instead. Or when—"

Sasuke's heard more than enough (mostly because he really does *not* want to hear Naruto expose every time he's given into his taunting). Throwing away whatever bitter self control he has left (there's none, not when Naruto's involved), he rolls up his jeans as high as they go before he jumps into the pond.

Naruto's right; the water surface barely skims his thighs. It's not enough for *either* of them to fall in deep, even with Naruto's clumsiness, but the gathering duckweed around his skin is oddly cloying. If not death by drowning, then death by weed suffocation.

"You're such a liar, y'know," Naruto tells him. He looks proud of himself. Sasuke wants to give his duckweed suffocation theory a try. "Oh, I'm Sasuke and I'm too cool to find frogs. I'm Sasuke and I can't risk my pedicure, so I'm not getting in the pond. I'm Sasuke and—"

Sasuke splashes him with a handful of grimy pond water. "I'm Naruto and I can't shut the fuck up," he mocks back. "Oh wait, now I can. Because all I have is pond water in my mouth—*fuck*!"

Naruto's dropped the toad, in favor of sending water flying back at Sasuke. "Fuck you, I lost my toad 'cuz of you!"

"You dropped him yourself, dumbass!"

"Because of you!"

The pond water is filthy. Sasuke knows he'll be suffering from mosquito bites all over his arms, and his skin will be itching like no one's business, in spite of three showers he's going to take when they get home. But—

It's *Naruto*.

(He likes to think he's grown a bit since they were kids. That his impulses have been tempered and he doesn't fall victim to his whims as easily. He likes to think that he can resist Naruto's bait now, that he's grown past the low-hanging fruit that's bullying his best friend.)

(Unfortunately, as much as he loathes to admit: Naruto is his weakness.)

"Mannn," Naruto exhales. He drags a wet hand through his hair, ignoring how the dead reeds thread through his sopping strands. "Now I gotta get a new frog. An *actual* frog, and not a toad."

He's going to get sick, Sasuke thinks absentmindedly. In this misty fog, in the on-and-off drizzle that's been coming and going as often as their absent mentor, in the freezing pond that they're knee deep and soaked to the bone in. Naruto's always been prone to illness, his colds being the worst of all. He's a pain when he's sick: always sniffling every two seconds instead of honking into a tissue, always coughing up his lungs onto their kitchen utensils, always pushing his popsicle feet under Sasuke's legs in search of warmth (and stealing the blanket while he's at it).

Naruto swears up and down that Sasuke's the blanket hog, but privately, Sasuke knows he only gets the blanket about forty five percent of the time. Naruto is the one who holds the shares on it during the majority of the night.

(The heat comes warmer when Sasuke's pressed up against Naruto's back anyways.)

But Sasuke digresses. The main point is that Naruto is going to get sick from the pond and the rain and his sopping wet clothes. He's going to say he's fine, holding his frog box and trying to hide his sneezes in his armpit. He's going to trail water in their genkan and all over their hardwood floors, and spend at least thirty minutes watching his frog before he gets in the shower. And by the time he gets out, he'll have come down with a full blown fever, attach himself to Sasuke like an overgrown octopus, and Sasuke is going to have to take care of him.

Sasuke *will* take care of him, undoubtedly so.

Not like he's going to admit that out loud, of course.

The best course of action, to mitigate the worst of these effects (the sneezing and the fever), is to find Naruto a frog as quickly as possible.

So, with that in mind, Uchiha Sasuke, renowned nonbeliever, sends a quick prayer to a god, any god, and plunges his hands into the pond.

His fingers grapple duckweed roots, dirt, lazy reeds. A fish darts past his knuckles, and sand dusts lazily about. Still, he searches blindly.

It's better like this, he tells himself. Better that he sacrifice his clothes and his hands to get a stupid fucking frog, than for Naruto to come down with a full blown fever.

It's likely, of course, that it's far too late already. Still, Sasuke wants to go home, and he also wants his personal space heater working at full capacity tonight, because Naruto *definitely* owes him after this one.

Even with Sasuke searching, there's still a distinct lack of the sounds of swishing water. When he looks up, Naruto's staring at him, slack-jawed and wide-eyed. His hands are still cupped, as if holding an invisible frog in his hands.

"What?" Sasuke snaps, peeved. "If you're not gonna look, then we might as well go home."

"I—you—" Naruto blinks rapidly. "What happened to wanting to stay *safe and dry* on the shore?"

He scoffs in return, plunging his hands back into the murky waters. The duckweed tickles his wrists, and under the leaves, he can feel the tailwinds of something large swimming past. Damn, missed again.

"Dobe, I'm fucking soaked already," he says, deadpan. "You're about ten minutes too late for that argument. Now get your damn hands in the water. I wanna go home already."

Naruto snorts, muttering something underneath his breath, but the sound of his search joins Sasuke's. The pond waters ripple with their hands, following the push and pull of their fingers.

"Y'know," Naruto starts. The swish of the water doesn't cease, but it's gentler now. "I thought you would've wanted the extra time to drown me in the pond yourself."

Sasuke huffs, pushing a wet strand of hair out of his eyes. "I still plan to do that, don't worry, idiot."

"I can hear a 'but' in there, Sas, c'mon, spit it out."

He rolls his eyes. "But you're going to get sick if we're out here any longer."

There's a pause. A soft intake of breath. It's then he realizes the enormity of his statement, the raw honesty twined in with the deadpan.

Too much, he thinks frantically. His heart is suddenly too loud in his chest, pounding away like a bass boosted jackhammer.

He was too honest, too open, it was too much and Naruto's going to—

Naruto is—

"I guess you're right," Naruto says softly. His hand brushes Sasuke's in the water, his pinky twining around his. "And then who's going to be your space heater in bed?"

"Still you," he mumbles. Naruto's pinky squeezes his gently. "You owe me, dobe."

“I do,” he agrees. “But y’know, your hands are really cold.”

”It’s like we’re knee deep in a pond with our hands in the water. Who would’ve thought?”

Naruto kicks a bit of water at him, but he pulls their linked hands out of the water. When Sasuke braves the thrum of his heartbeat to meet his gaze, Naruto’s gaze is terribly fond, and so, very—

He’s—

“You don’t like being cold,” Naruto says simply. “So let’s come back another day.”

He says it like it’s a fact of life, says it as simply as when Sasuke had reminded him that he gets sick easily. Like how the sky was blue and the grass was green. And maybe it is a truth, one that belongs to them only.

Sasuke straightens. He doesn’t pull his hand away. “I thought you wanted a frog to bring home to Gamakichi.”

“I still do,” Naruto agrees, but he’s leading them back to the bank where their bags are scattered. “But maybe when it’s warmer out, so your stupid ice-block hands won’t fall off.”

Heat prickles the back of Sasuke’s neck.

“Says the one who shoves his feet under my knees every night.”

“And you stick your hands under my shirt, so we’re even, asshole.”

Their soaked feet are sticky on the reeds of the bank. It’s somewhere between borderline freezing and slick with sweat, and Sasuke sets to digging in his bag for a towel. At the same time he grasps his, Naruto’s throwing one at Sasuke.

“Take mine.”

He raises a brow, pulling his towel—albeit smaller—out of his bag. “I brought my own. Use it on your stupid hair before you catch a cold.”

“Mine’s fluffier,” Naruto says. His damp fingers nudge the towel further into Sasuke’s chest. “You take this, and I’ll have yours.”

Before Sasuke can argue or agree, he’s snatching the smaller towel out of Sasuke’s hands and rubbing his hair into it, much like an overgrown cat.

Huffing, Sasuke wraps the towel around himself, pulling it tight around his collar. It’s dry, annoyingly warm, and irritatingly enough, smells like Naruto’s detergent. He pretends to wipe his face dry, if only to inhale the musk of his soap, before he reaches for the towel in Naruto’s hands.

“Gimme that—”

“Hey! I gave you mine! Fair trade—”

“Dumbass, let me dry your hair. You’re doing it wrong,” he snaps back, and Naruto relinquishes the towel without a fight.

Sasuke rubs at his hair gently, making sure to towel off every damp strand of hair. For the first time, Naruto isn’t squirming or restless. He’s sitting perfectly still—a first for him.

“You don’t have to, y’know,” Naruto says. It’s rushed out, as if he’d said it without much thought. Or maybe he thought about it too long.

“Stupid,” Sasuke says, feeling so horribly fond. “I want to.”

Naruto turns to peek at him. His eyes—wide, blue like summer skies, so terribly blue—glimmer with something warm. “You do?”

Maybe he has changed, he thinks then. Maybe he’s still the same boy who gives in too easily to Naruto’s recklessness, but now, he’s someone who can take care of him in the same breath too.

“Don’t make me say it again,” he mutters. His cheeks feel hot all around, and from the widening of Naruto’s knowing smile, he can tell that it hasn’t missed his best friend’s notice either. “Though, we didn’t *have* to start packing up. I’m not a baby, I can handle the cold for a few more hours.”

“Yeah, but…” He plucks duckweed leaves off of Sasuke’s shirt, flicking them back into the water. When he looks back, he’s got that wide open gaze, the one that threatens to splay Sasuke’s honesty across his sleeve for the world to see. “I wanted to take care of you too.”

And maybe Sasuke’s not the only one who’s changed either.

amarettosis

Harvest

Bad and Crazy

"The spring before Suyeol's promotion, something begins to change."

Suyeol has been asleep for a long, long time. With rain comes a great unfurling. Growth, he soon remembers, is not always kind.

When a bone heals wrong, after all, the only cure is to break it.

The spring before Suyeol's promotion, something begins to change.

Not so obviously. Not enough to raise any sort of alarm. His high-rise apartment is the same. His paycheck is the same, to say nothing of any extra… bonuses on the side. He gets the job done, and avoids the parts of his job he doesn't like, Yang Jaeseon chasing behind him.

It's just that he… gets these *headaches*.

In flashes and bursts; like he's drunk too much, or stood up too fast… or was clubbed in the back of the head. There's no reason to it; no consistent pattern he can trace. He wakes in the tub, suit still on, after a particularly trying company dinner, ass-kissing as far as the eye can see, and thinks nothing more of it.

He tries very, very hard to think nothing more of it.

Why he blinks, and he's standing at a crosswalk, a granny patting his arm to thank him for "helping me along" — why he closes his eyes in preemptive anguish for a tumble on the pavement after tripping on a crevice and… he's standing up again, perhaps dustier than before, but he isn't afraid anymore, not at all.

"It feels like someone's watching me! Or shutting *me* out? Listen, Yang Jaeseon. I'm just hungover, right? That's why I stand up and can't remember when I came into a room?"

"Ah, hyung, I've told you not to drink too much before, don't you remember? We've all taken a few hits to the head, you know your tolerance isn't good anymore!"

"That can't be how that works, now answer the question…"

His partner just shakes his head, tugging his arms through a light jacket as Suyeol chases after him out the agency doors. “I’m driving,” Jaeseon calls distrustfully, holding the door open just long enough for Suyeol to pop through before turning his back on him to walk through the parking lot.

“And I don’t know! It could be, it could not—why don’t you ever want to visit the doctor?”

“You know they don’t pay us well enough for that…”

The doctor says Suyeol is completely *fine*.

He maintains this stance, even when his mother kicks the back of his shins and scolds up a storm about “past concussions, and that awful knife scar across your stomach…”

(He’d taken her for an appointment of hers; was bullied into one of his own, “you’re already here, don’t make me waste my breath…”)

“Perhaps you’re under some stress, Mr. Ryu,” he remembers the doctor saying, her warm brown eyes flashing with some concern. “Have you been sleeping well?”

Suyeol had grimaced. “Sure,” he’d said with a sigh, scratching his nose and looking away. “But you know my line of work.”

…So what if he had left with a referral to a psychiatrist!? He didn’t need it. And when he drops his mother off at his childhood home that Saturday afternoon, he repeats it out the window with a vengeance. *Nothing* was wrong.

And he’s right, for a while. He stops drinking as much. Goes so far as to even bring bottled water to his car. His desk is still a mess, but he gets his paperwork in on time. No crosswalk grannies. No headaches.

When he dismisses Baek Junghak’s case, something flashes so hot and blinding that for a moment, he’s unable to stand.

(*Please*, plead his daughter’s eyes, her father’s ledger hidden in her school locker. *Won’t you make it so that he can’t come home anymore?*)

…The drive there had been long. He didn’t sleep well. The coffee didn’t sit right with his stomach.

When he comes to himself again, little rationalizations echoing in his skull, the wind outside the cafe parking lot blows the flowering petals loose, alighting in his hair; littering his path. Then the paper notes from his hand—then his car keys, grip on them loosened in startlement from how a flyer smacked into his face before careening away.

Shit fuck, what the *hell*—Suyeol runs a hand down his face, sputtering, before dropping to his knees in horror, the sound of jingling echoing farther and farther away.

Fallen down a storm drain, grate bars laughably far apart.

Fuck!

Sweat? Tears? The droplets that wet his path soon coalesce into an unforgiving rain, the sky splitting open in an instant.

"*Aish*," Suyeol almost howls, hands scrabbling to lift at the grate in vain, already thinking of how the weather would wash his keys far and away. *He didn't bring an umbrella!*

A good deed. A memory. Retribution?

Even if there wasn't a common cause to these headaches, there still seemed to be one of three overarching consequences. Or an effect. Or... ah! What was the point!? His physical exams checked out, his pain pills from the pharmacies would never run out so long as he had a say in it...

Suyeol forgets everything. Combs back his hair, styling gel thick on his fingers. Even if his brother was all set up with the pizza shop and his mother was fine running the food stall on her own, they were both still so silly. No retirement saved up!? Always skimming from the tip jar!?

If not for himself, then his sanity as his family's second son...

Ryu Suyeol still had a promotion to earn, and he would do whatever it took to get it.

It's raining again. An onslaught, quicksilver in its onset and its execution just as unforgiving. When Suyeol runs into the precinct from the parking lot, his blazer is already drenched. "It's nothing," he laughingly reassures his bosses, called into a sudden meeting for more unsavory beneath-the-table dealings, his smile brittle, hair still dripping onto the fancy carpet. A lapdog with a longer leash.

Nothing at all.

It keeps raining. Spring showers roar into summer storms. Suyeol falls deeper, blacker, richer. It doesn't *hurt* him, Yang Jaeseon knows very well. Only the naive, the stupid, and the dead would claim to be anything but corrupt.

With autumn comes caramel suits and longer socks. With autumn comes *migraines* that tear through his subconscious with memories that damn near tear his composure apart.

Then… dripping water, his television buzzing static. Then a motorbike. Then the sauna.

Lightning crackles between his ears when a crowbar pries his elevator doors apart—leads and bodies and the autumn harvest spring from the soil, from his mother's backyard garden when the pieces finally come together,

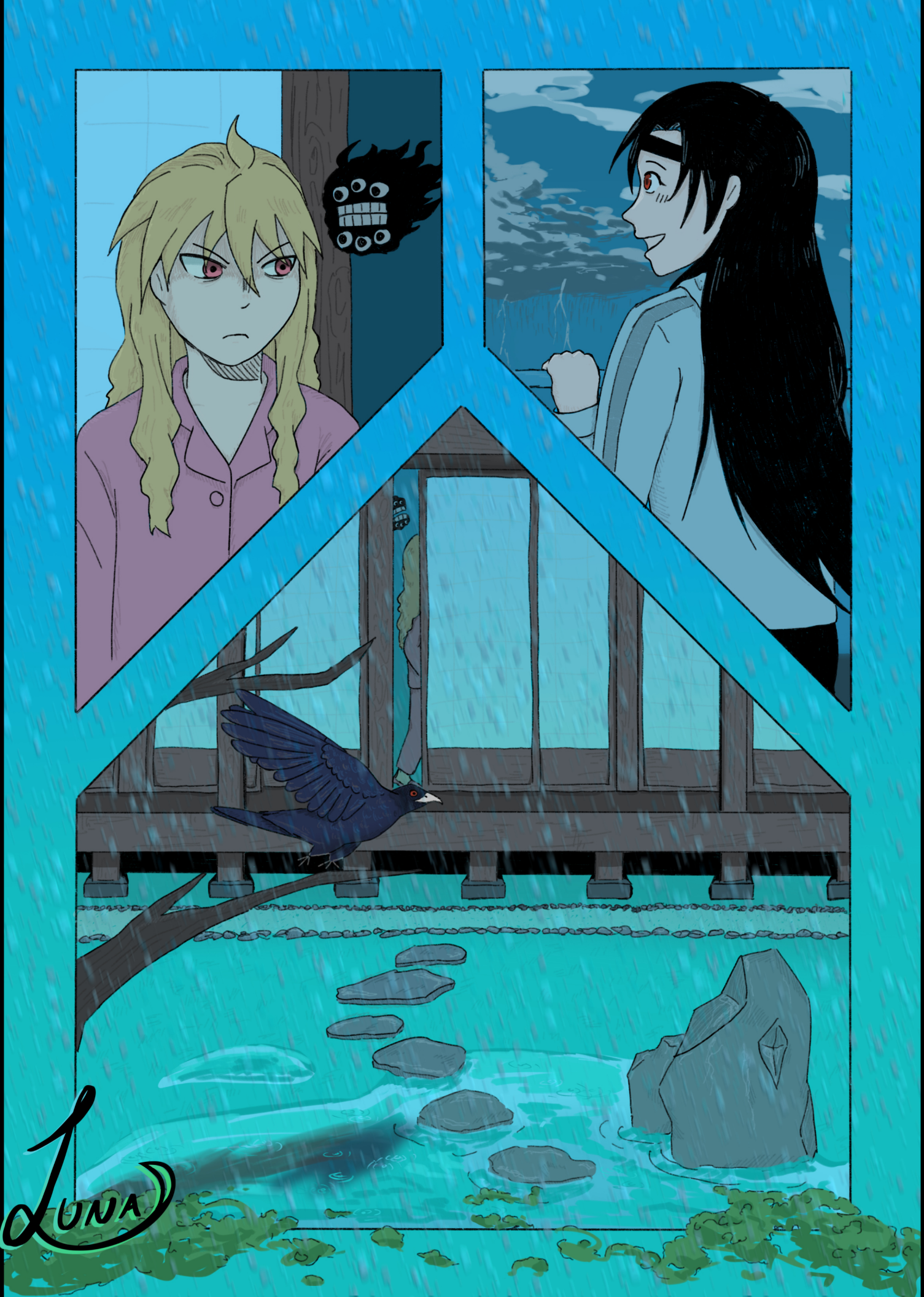
The car alarm they'd fallen three stories from is blaring. Suyeol can't hear anything past his roaring heartbeat, blood and adrenaline storming between his ears. He is cold, freezing cold. Oh Gyeongtae, cradled in his arms, is so very, very warm.

Then a landing. Then the hero.

His head hurts. *Everything* hurts. When the helmet is lifted, his tormentor's face revealed… the pain narrows down. Focuses. Then disappears.

"It's nice to meet you," the mysterious man laughs, and it's as if all his agonies have concentrated into one single, unpredictable being.

"Ryu Suyeol."


Luna

from eden

D&D OCs

If there had been any benefit to storms, it would be that nobody came to bother Fen. Sure, the thunder could be annoying when it broke his focus while he was reading, and the one time he'd left a window open without realizing it was probably the worst day in recent memory, but overall, storms provided some nice peace and solitude, and Fen was more than ready to enjoy that. So, really, he couldn't be blamed for ignoring the less likable parts of storms, like his door rattling during the current one. It was probably just the wind, anyways—the storm was nasty tonight, and he could see how violently the trees were swaying when the flashes of lightning would illuminate the forest. He could even hear some wayward branches and twigs hitting his roof that had likely been ripped right off the trees by the brutal wind. Nobody in their right mind would be outside in those conditions, and although he could hear some plates rattling with every branch that hit his roof, he had no intentions of checking the damages now. No, Fen would just enjoy his tea and the blissful solitude and not worry about anything his patron might want from him or missing roof shingles.

Or rather, that had been the plan, and it would've been perfectly executed had the kitchen window not loudly flown open, forcing Fen to his feet and sprinting to the kitchen just in time to see Echo, soaking wet, throwing herself through the window and directly into the sink with a crash.

They could only stand frozen in shock for a few moments before Echo attempted to drag herself the rest of the way through the window and they had to scramble to keep their mugs safe from her flailing legs, cursing the entire way. He managed to swipe the delicate dishes to the side as she crashed to the kitchen floor, slamming the window shut and making *sure* it was locked this time. There was a beat of silence as they both regained their bearings, only broken by the sound of a very soaked Echo peeling herself off of the hardwood. Fen put his face in his hands, listening to her boots squelch.

"*What* are you doing?"

"Getting up, duh." Echo panted. They groaned.

"What are you doing *breaking into my kitchen?*"

“You weren’t answering the door!” She waved her hands in annoyance as he scowled. “What else was I supposed to do!”

“Leave me be?” She gave him a look and he corrected himself, knowing she’d never do that so easily. “Fine, knock *louder*?”

“As if you’d open up in this weather,” she grumbled. Fen sighed, watching her hop to her feet and begin pacing around. Her boots were making horrible squeaking sounds with every step that made his eye twitch, and every curl of her wild hair was weighed down with rain water, dripping into countless puddles on the floor. And the table. And the chairs.

“Echo—hey, not on the rug!”

“I am nowhere *near* the rug!” She said, moving away from it anyways. Fen recoiled as the action brought her closer to them. “And where are *you* going?”

“Away from you, so you don’t get my sweater wet!” They dodged a shower of drops as she tossed her hair out of her face. “Gods, stop *dripping* everywhere!”

“Oh, *please*, it’s fine!”

“Not my *cushions*, Echo– no, no, no, don’t grab my sleeve, I’m going to be *wet*!”

“You’ll be damp at worst!”

“No, I’ll be *soaked*! Like *you*! What is *wrong* with you today?”

And maybe he had been a little more abrasive than he’d meant to be, because her response was a surprisingly firm “*nothing*.” Maybe he’d been a lot more abrasive than he’d meant to be, because Echo was actually giving him a scowl. Fen was sure he’d made Echo feel more than her fair share of frustration before (which he maintained was revenge for how much of a nuisance she’d been to him when they’d first met), but an *angry* Echo was an entirely new beast. He took a deep breath and one more step backwards, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. Echo stood defiantly in the middle of the room, still dripping and shaking slightly in every limb as she scanned him carefully. Fen did the same to her, the uneasy feeling looming over him growing with every moment of her uncharacteristic behaviour. Her brows were tightly knit together, her entire body was tense, and as yet another gust of wind blew something against the side of the house, he watched her jaw clench tighter.

“Are you okay?” He risked asking. She straightened further, drawing herself to her full (albeit short) height.

“Fine, and you?”

Fen raised a brow. “Y’know, Airhead, given you came crashing through my window, I sort of doubt that.”

“Answer the question.” She said. Both of Fen’s eyebrows were now raised as he looked at her. She stood, trembling, expression firm. It felt, impossibly, like their roles had switched—as if, for once, *she* was the mysterious one. Slowly, he nodded.

“...well, likewise, I guess. I was actually just getting up to make a fresh pot of tea.”

“Oh, don’t tell me it’s that terrible bitter gunk you usually drink,” she sighed, and *there* was some of the Echo he knew. That was enough of a good sign to tell them they were on the right track, and they latched onto it mentally.

“If I were to make... I dunno, *jasmine*, would that be enough to make you not complain about how sinfully I treat my tastebuds?”

“I will relish in my victory, in fact, because the way you decide to use your free will to subject your mouth to horrendous flavours is a crime and *someone* needs to state that.”

“Oh my *gods*, whatever,” he huffed, but secretly, he was fighting a smile. It was difficult, admittedly, even considering the circumstances, and he had to yank his sweater up and over his head to ensure his mask wouldn’t be caught slipping. Echo’s confused (concerned) expression was covered by that same sweater being thrown at her face a moment later. Fen elected to turn and stride towards the kitchen instead of relishing in her offended squawk. “Stick your hair in that until I get back with an actual towel.”

“You just wanted to throw something at me,” she grumbled, but he knew she’d listen anyway.

As the tea finished steeping, Fen heavily considered their situation.

Echo was a nuisance in part due to her unflinching positivity. Every problem could be solved, in her eyes. Every little moment was meant to be savoured. Everything was met with the same amount of energy and passion, no matter what the situation was. At the same time, Echo was wildly observant and they’d never seen her miss even the slightest hint that someone or something was off. Throughout it all, she rarely let her smile fall. Fen had never heard her really, truly rant about something like they did, much less be annoyed, much less be *angry*. Dealing with her now felt like handling a live explosive. What would set her off?

They heard her shifting in the living room, hopefully still in the towels they’d provided for her (they couldn’t even be too mad about the upholstery, at this point in the mystery) and pursed their lips. Only one way to find out.

Echo looked up a little too fast for Fen to believe she was *actually* calm when he walked back to the living room, but he politely elected not to comment on it. She was way less hyper now than she had been, and even accepted the tea without an overly dramatic expression of agony, and he’d be damned if he wasted that opportunity. For a while, they sat in silence. Fen eventually found his place on a chair opposite Echo's spot on the couch, watching her take

cautious sips from her mug as she stared blankly forward. She was slouching, the towel just barely hanging onto her head as her now frizzy mass of hair did its best to escape. With every rattle of the windowpanes or flicker of lightning, her eyes would dart to the storm outside as if searching. There were dark circles under her eyes, actually, which he'd regrettably failed to notice until now. Her shoulders were hunched awkwardly, looking nearly painfully tense. Even now—even after negotiating her into sitting down for *his* sake—she looked just about ready to jump at him and… do something. He couldn't even fathom what he might've done to warrant all of this, or if it was his fault at all, for that matter.

"…tea okay?" He risked asking. She scoffed.

"Better than what you generally drink, for sure. I should come over more often to make sure you're not *torturing* yourself on the regular."

"You already come into my house randomly, unannounced, constantly."

"Exactly!" She smiled innocently at him and he couldn't help but to snicker. "Who else to take care of you if not me, hmm?"

"Myyyyyself? Because I am an adult?"

"Your favourite hobbies are sticking your nose into other people's business and living miserably, Fen. Anybody *but* you is qualified for the role, actually."

"Can't believe you're insulting me and I'm still giving you tea and snacks."

"Are there snacks?" She gasped. Fen dropped his face into his hand, listening to her laugh. "You're so easy to annoy."

"You're good at being *annoying*," he grumbled, and was horrified at the realization that they'd reached the point in their friendship that he didn't mean it anymore when he said that. Echo, when he peeked through his fingers, was sipping her tea and looking self-satisfied. Evidently she knew as well. Still, even as her smile remained carefree, her posture was tense. He chewed on his lip contemplatively. "So now that we're both feeling nicer…"

"I'm always a ray of sunshine, I don't know what you mean!"

"Mhm… so do you wanna tell me what's really wrong with you?"

The room fell silent, Echo evidently taking advantage of her drink to not talk. Fen looked at her, unflinching, watching for any little sign that could reveal what had set her off. "You know I can tell when you're lying to me."

"I never lie to you," she said softly. He tilted his head back and forth in a so-so motion.

"You sometimes do, but only for my benefit." Countless times he'd been too abrasive, snapped too angrily, or said something that cut too deep, and Echo had pretended it rolled off of her

like water on a duck's back. He could tell when it hurt her, though. He'd always been a bit too ashamed to ever apologize directly in the moment. "But this time isn't that, so..."

"I was just worried for you, what with the storm." That wasn't the whole truth, but it was closer to it. "I mean, your house isn't exactly the sturdiest, you know."

"Better than camping out there with you," he tried to joke. She nodded absentmindedly.

"That it is." The silence was somehow all the more awkward when it returned. Fen persevered, hoping he'd get something more from her. "I've weathered some pretty bad ones in my time."

"You're always travelling, so I can imagine."

"Really bad," she repeated distantly. The look in her eyes made his brows furrow. Well, maybe he really wasn't at fault for her foul mood after all. "I'm glad you were inside."

"I wouldn't be caught dead in this weather," he grumbled.

"If you were fixated on your research again..."

"Echo, I wouldn't," he sighed. "I like the rain but only when I'm inside listening to it."

"You're fairly stubborn about all your other decisions—"

"I would *never* want to worry you like that," they said firmly. Echo blinked slowly, her gaze still distant. Selfishly, they felt grateful that she couldn't see how being so up front about their concern bothered them. Equally as selfishly, they wished she would look at them and see how much they cared outwardly for once, the nagging fear that *she thinks I don't care about her* slowly invading the quieter corners of their mind. "...how about you stay the night."

"Fen, if you think I'm going back outside in *that*..."

"Good, then maybe you're smarter than you thought I'd be," they scowled—and immediately regretted, because where was that outward show of care they were just thinking about? But Echo must've been numb to it by this point (and what a terrible thought that was) because she barely even blinked, just stared out the window at the unyielding storm. "I'll set up, um, a... a cot for you."

"'Kay," she said softly, and Fen got up awkwardly and wandered off to stew in their turmoil while getting extra sheets. Despite their own impressive insightfulness, the feeling that they weren't going to be able to reach Echo weighed heavily on them. It wasn't *their* fault she was acting so out of character, but... maybe it was their fault that they'd never considered a situation like this to even be a possibility.

Tomorrow would be a new day. They could only hope it would bring upon a new clue as to how to reach a woman who never let herself be seen weakened.

Shyan

@rhinty*co (instagram)

Spring Rain

Avatar the Last Airbender | Zuko & Sokka

SilverBlue

Sokka can't seem to find Zuko, no matter where he looks. But at the sight of the soft spring rain outside, he immediately gets a clue. Would the rain reveal more than he hoped?... 🌟

Sokka had been searching for almost an hour now. He was infuriated. No one seemed to know where Zuko was. Tui and La, how can you lose the Fire Lord in his own palace?!

Then again, it was a huge palace. What is more, Zuko could be incredibly sneaky when he wanted to. Sokka chuckled as he turned a corner, remembering the many times his friend had evaded him around Ba Sing Se in the guise of the Blue Spirit. Very sneaky indeed...

Another hour, yeah it felt like a solid hour, the Water Tribe Ambassador ran around in circles around the long-winding corridors, checking out all the usual, and unusual places. Zuko was neither in his study, nor his chambers, not in the kitchens, or the training hall, not in the room they kept for Iroh when he visited (Sokka knew that this was one of Zuko favourite hideaways), or the lounge they used when the gaang gathered in the palace. It had to be the turtleduck pond then. Sokka was about to march himself there with due haste, when the sky spirits literally rained on his plans. A fond smirk split his face. He knew where to go now but he needed a few supplies first.

Contrary to what one would think, Zuko loved the rain. Especially the soft rain in spring.

Sokka had the sneaking suspicion why, yet he hoped that one day his friend would tell him himself.

By now Sokka had a couple of years in his role as ambassador and while that did mean extensive travelling, he spent most of his time otherwise in Caldera, by Zuko's side. Thus he knew the Fire Lord's habits better than even his personal assistant and attendant Zhong. Shielded under an umbrella, bag of supplies over his shoulder, Sokka made his way through the royal gardens at a brisk pace.

When he reached his target, a small, unassuming gazebo, at the far end, on top of the hill overlooking the field laden with crops, there was already someone there. He stood there for a moment, observing the familiar silhouette. Zuko was deep in thought, gaze swimming in the

the distance, but there was no tension in his frame. Sokka loved when he was able to see him like that, calm. Too many worries and duties plagued his friend daily. Demons Sokka couldn't save him from. Yet he would try his darndest, spirits permit.

"Mind if I joined?" Sokka asked as he propped the dripping umbrella near the entrance. Zuko's soft smile was the only answer he needed.

For a few stretched out moments they sat in comfortable silence, lost in the magnificent view laid before them. Down in the meadow, sheltered by the mighty ridges of the silent volcano, were the bountiful crop fields of the Fire Nation (well one of many but those held special royal significance or something like that, Sokka was not quite sure). You could see as the plants were rising from the rich soil, ripening and growing with the help of the elements. It would be a bountiful harvest in a few months' time. Zuko should be proud.

It was mesmerising. The rain was falling softly, soaking the black ground. It was so gentle and smooth, so quiet, almost as if the scene was wrapped in a gauzy curtain. Somehow Sokka wished he could stay here and watch the fields forever, sheltered away from the world, in the hope of the upcoming harvest.

With effort he tore his gaze away and started setting up what he had brought with him.

A small kettle and a couple of unassuming cups emerged from his satchel. And then the air in the gazebo was filled with the heavy aroma of spiced tea blend. That more than anything got Zuko's attention.

"Have you been snooping in Uncle's room again?" He teased.

"Rude! I never snoop!" Sokka's piercing blue eyes shot up meeting playful molten lava. He stood his ground as much as he could but ultimately caved at Zuko's raised eyebrow. "Ok, fine. I snoop... a lot... but don't pretend you don't partake in the fruits of my efforts. This however, was a gift. Oh, don't act so surprised. I love Iroh, and pai sho, and as an honorary member of the White Lotus, knowing tea is a must... And I also happen to love tea too."

Without being prompted Zuko grabbed the canteen from the bag, poured water into the kettle and slowly started to heat it up between his hands.

"Iroh, he... he keeps sending me different blends. And every time I visit, we sit together to play pai sho and then he tells me all these wise words about tea and seasons. It's really nice. It reminds me of sitting down and talking to Gran Gran. One time I asked about the ceremony and the methods, and it has had me hooked ever since."

"We should have tea ceremony together," Zuko whispered softly and embers bloomed deep in Sokka's core. It felt so intimate.

"Yeah, I'd like that."

They turned back to the view of the fields, silently sipping their tea.

Sokka didn't know when or how, but Zukko was now leaning against his shoulder.

"I love the rain. Spring rain however holds a special meaning in my heart. It means hope… It comes soft and unassuming and cleanses the earth, giving way to the new. Somehow… somehow, it holds a special kind of magic."

Sokka remained silent. There was no need for more words.

Sitting his cup on the bench, he gently encircled Zuko in his arms, drawing him ever so close. Gaze still trained on the bountiful fields, he placed a soft kiss on the Fire Lord's temple.

Zuko curled closer into his embrace, setting his head in the crook of Sokka's neck. The air was filled with the gentle aroma of flowers waking up and the subtle note of dark tea. He could feel plump lips curve in a fond smile against his thundering pulse.

Spring hope was blooming in Sokka's heart…

Siverfonweedo

This spring,

I am not the fallen baby bird
shackled to dank, wet earth,
hollow bones shattered.
A bird's bountiful boon snatched away,
and leaving only bone-chilling bursts
from a lingering winter wind
to fill what spaces are left behind.

This spring,
the damp earth perfumes the air,
petrichor and humidity.
Grey clouds part for a sky
blue as the open sea.
I am unfettered in my rain dance,
though my hollow bones tremble,
bearing old weight on a body renewed.
Trees that once loomed,
eternally tantalizing,
look so much smaller from up here.
This spring,
the rain promises me with fruit-sweet kisses,
a belly well-filled and a journey unknown.

This spring,
I weave through rain-threads
all spinning on one great loom.
My bird's eye views the broken wings
of last spring's memory,
quivering in a wintry wind from nowhere at all,
spirits dampened by a layer
of cold, wet mud.

This spring,
the sky and I embrace
amidst tear-filled clouds.
The sky holds its winter-sharp tongue
as I cradle last spring's baby bird,
figure phantasmal as the rainbows
embroidered in cerulean sky.
The sky watches,
waits,
and when the wailing from the fragile me
nested in my arms
is nothing but fading swansong,
the sky winds winds around me;
a homecoming both warm and welcome.

This spring,
broken wings and breaking hearts
rejoin the rains and the winds
in carrying this small, slight bird
to freedom never seen
past the leaves of verdant,
untouchable trees.

Amidst the precipitating clouds,
I take care not to lose sight
of the damp, fertile mud below,
and soar towards an unknown frontier
on wings still bearing stains,
still hollow-boned,
but beating,
beating,
beating,
in time with the baby-bird heart in my chest.

雨霞

techa

lia

In the Quiet of the Rain

PJO | Solangelo

SilverBlue

A lazy rainy afternoon... Nico reflects on spring, the seasons, hope and the future... 🌞

It was a lazy afternoon. Nico loved lazy afternoons.

They didn't really get many of those. It had been a few years since both he and Will said goodbye to Camp and moved in together in New York, looking for a new chapter of their lives... whatever that meant.

Initially that had meant going to college, and for Will it would mean that for several more years, until residency. For Nico however this was the final semester.

His dark eyes followed the tiny streams the raindrops were forming on the high window of their loft. He loved the rain. And there was a certain magic to spring rain.

Will on the other hand was not much for rain. He always got sleepy and lethargic when it rained. Figures, stupid child of Apollo, sunshine boyfriend.

Still, Nico quite enjoyed when they could spend lazy rainy days like that, tangled together, Will's head gently nestled in his lap while he played with those golden locks. Don't tell anyone however. Or he *will* send an army of skeletons after you.

The window was cracked open and Nico could experience the rain with all his senses. Listen to it softly falling on the rundown pavement outside, or pitterpattering over the leaves on the trees in the small garden across the street... It was like an ephemeral concert. And if you added the small snorts and whisps Will made, it was perfect. He had fallen asleep probably half an hour ago, the poor thing.

The raindrops were so thin that it was almost as if there was an iridescent film overlaid over the image of the world. Maybe it was a different kind of mist? Maybe it was one of Iris's blessings? No matter what it was, the world looked different to Nico then. As it always did when we would catch the spring rain. Everything looked new, brighter, hopeful... He could almost feel the earth accumulating all this positive energy and imbuing it in the upcoming harvest. As if the rains would come down from the heavens and swipe everything clean, charging it, nourishing it... Nico would probably never really acknowledge it, but for him,

spring rain was a clean slate, a renewal, a fresh start. And even if rain was difficult times for Will, he would be there to keep him safe, to shield him from anything that could come.

As Will stirred lightly in his lap, Nico laced their fingers together and bent down to plant a soft kiss at his temple.

Sleep well tesoro. No matter what the future will bring for us, we will manage... together...

The rain will clean our path...

WOLFSBANE SPECTER

haiku for *sequoia sempervirens*

warm fog-swept embrace
these mist-crowned guards see rain twice
sink into wet earth

footprints of wildfire—
water drips to feathered sprays
green sprouts push striped black

the hardened mothers
fire and rain raise their children
twin daughters look up

a single raindrop
on the end of a needle—
we wait for the fall

Rowan Graening

Force

Rebirth

I'll take a deep breath as if it's my last

And hope I go out in a glorious laugh
As the roots tug at my shoes
And the floor starts to sway
My knees bend and crack
There's a crash and a thunderous laugh

Rain coats my body
Gentle droplets decay
My fingers brush nettles
But the pain never stays

Bones sink into the mud
The earth beckons me to stay
My lungs fill with weeds
My skin feels the breeze
May my body become a home
For little creatures to stay
To see kindness in man's greatest gift
To leave the world just as it is

Spudie

Eli

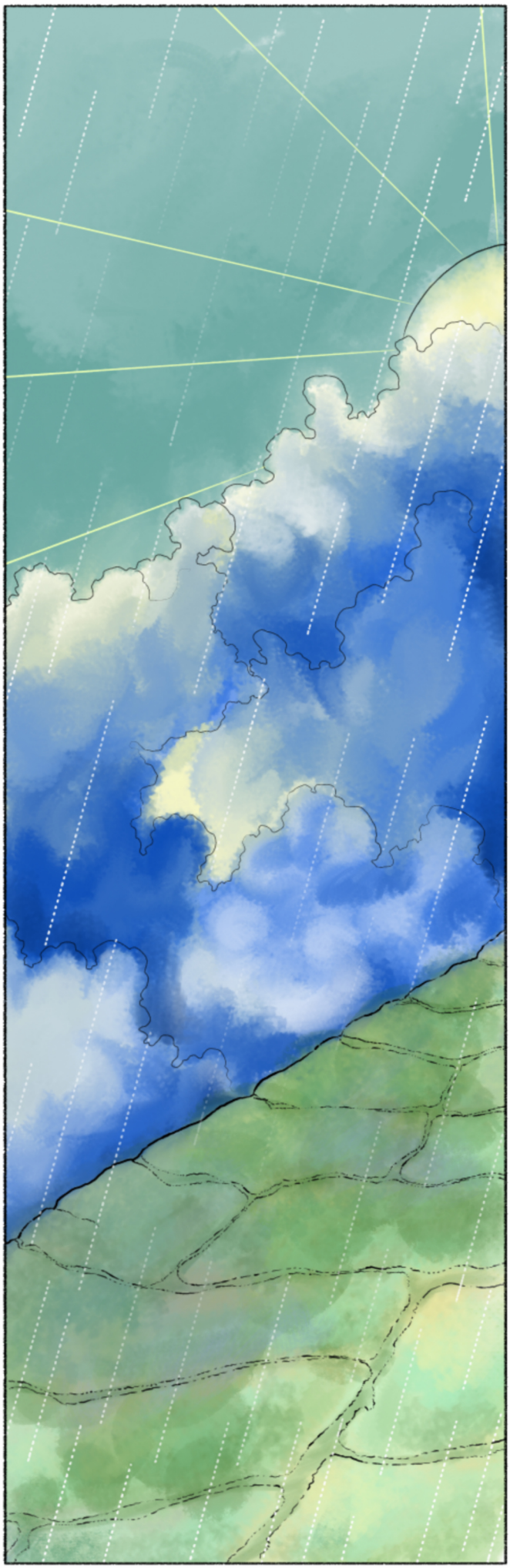
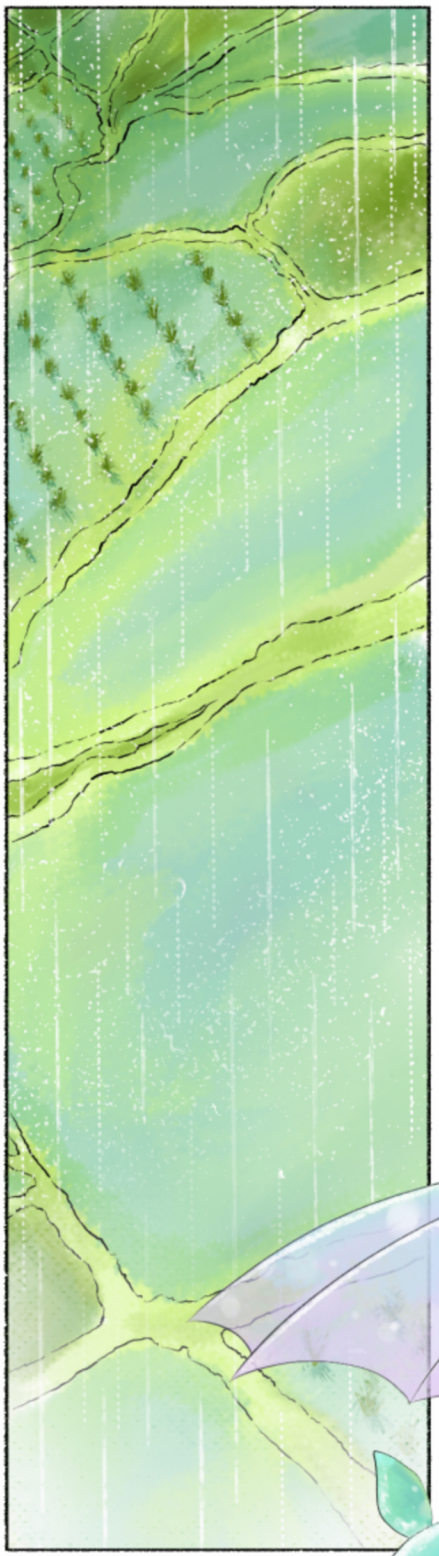
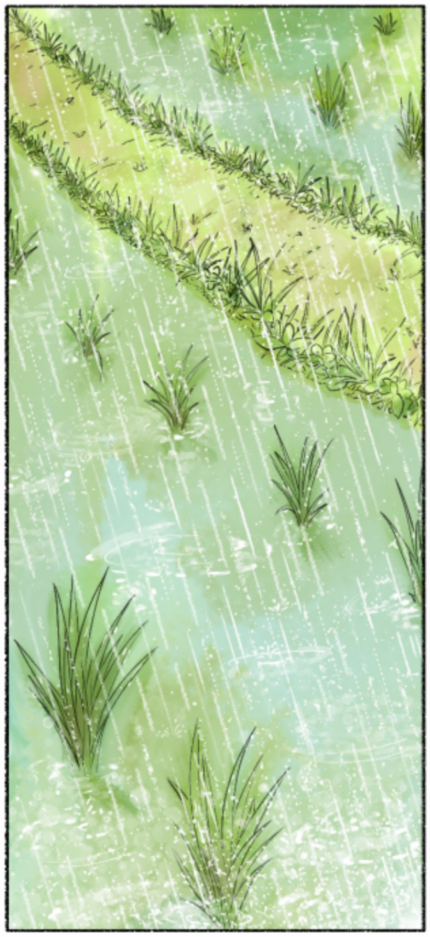
feather · fall

〈落 · 羽〉

(start from top left and follow the directions)

↓ down
from the skies
silky spider threads
skitter across flowerbeds
pitter-patter, hua-la-la~
our crops are watered!
smell:
(the after)
petrichor galore
rice, steeping in reservoirs
so grow! from your fresh root spas
see you in a few
when your fields are full
grains, all ripe
that fall just
right →

← left
a feather
not even
fly on till there is
don't stop where you are
so bold! with your crests and calls
hoopoes, along foliaged roofs
whiffs of cinnamon
(a vagrant?)
hear:
our homies are fed!
mogu-mogu, om-nom-nom~
dream a dream of mulberry
baby moth armies
at the skies
up ↑

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NOTE
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zine download!
@melancholic umbrella

Contributors

Adesa
adesa_arts (insta)
adesa-arts.carrd.co
adesa-arts (tumblr)

amarettosis
amarettosis (tumblr, insta)
amarettosis.bsky.social (bsky)

DARIIUS *(back cover)*
buttermilkbear.neocities.org

Eclipse
e.clips.crafts (insta)
chocororos (tumblr)

Elisa Zorzella
kalu_kadu (insta)
elizorzella (cara)

ghostqueennotmean
sovreignspecter (twt, tumblr)
ghostqueennotmean (ao3)

jubilantscribbler
jubilantscribbler (tumblr)
jubiliantwriter (tumblr)
jubilantscribbler.bsky.social (bsky)

kiroiimye
kiroiimye (ao3)

Luna
gender_gander (insta)
galactic-chaos9 (tumblr)

Melancholic Umbrella
MelancholicTnT (twt)
melancholicumbrella (tumblr)
melancholictnt.bsky.social (bsky)

MnemonicMask *(front cover)*
mnemonicmask (tumblr)
mnemonicmask.carrd.co

Moss
wolfsbanespecter (tumblr)

RiverLoche
Scaredwitchyboi (insta)
Exhausted-Demon (tumblr)
Sanberrymuffin.bsky.social (bsky)

Rowan Graening
asinglerowanberry (tumblr)

shyan
rhinty.co (insta)

SilverBlue
we.are.urban.rebels (insta)
liluger4e (ao3)
liluger4e.carrd.co

Siver
siverfw.carrd.co

Spudie
@Princess_Spud (insta)

tb. (tangentburd)
toban (ao3)
tangentburd.carrd.co

Techa *(most writers' name graphics)*
tenshi_agerasia (insta, ao3)
tenshi-agerasia (tumblr)
techa.uwu.ai

Tia
peach__tia (insta)

VForce
vforce_8 (insta, twt)
vforce-8.bsky.social (bsky)

wren - myluckymoon
myluckymoon (twt)
thisusernametaken (ao3)